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SUBJECT: Rwandan Government Action on Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence

¶1. Summary: During a May 8 courtesy call on the Minister in Charge of Family and Gender Promotion in the Prime Minister's Office, Ambassador underscored USG interest in gender issues, in particular trafficking in persons, and Embassy's desire to provide assistance to the GOR to combat child prostitution. The Minister noted that Rwandan law defines "trafficking" as having a cross-border element and that Rwanda has no such cases. The GOR has established a task force and drafted legislation to address the issue of an estimated 6,500 street children. It also has plans to strengthen the 2001 law on the protection of children against violence. End summary.

¶2. Ambassador met with Valerie Nyirahabineza, Minister in Charge of Family and Gender Promotion in the Prime Minister's Office, on May 8 to emphasize the importance of the issue of trafficking in persons and to discuss ways in which the U.S. and Rwanda can cooperate to combat the problem. He noted that while many of our assistance programs, such as our USD 71 million HIV-AIDS program in Rwanda, may indirectly benefit women and street children, Embassy wanted to explore possibilities for addressing the specific issue of trafficking in persons.

¶3. He explained that the USG definition of "trafficking" is not limited to cross-border incidents but includes prostitution of any minor under the age of 18, who is considered a trafficking "victim." Because the U.S. considers trafficking in persons a serious crime, it is exploring ways to combat the problem worldwide. He asked the Minister how best the U.S. and Rwanda could cooperate on combating trafficking in general, and child prostitution in particular.

¶4. The Minister recalled that in 2005 the GOR received a critical report on trafficking of women and children from NGO "Sharing Rwanda." The GOR believed this report exaggerated the extent of the problem and issued a response. While the GOR itself has not surveyed the extent of the problem, the Minister noted that as a result of the genocide and widespread poverty, Rwanda has small groups of street children, some of whom have become prostitutes.

¶5. She explained that under Rwandan law "trafficking" is defined as including the crossing of international borders and that Rwanda does not have such cases, but has other problems as a consequence of the genocide, including poverty and large numbers of widows and orphans. The GOR has established a task force comprised of the Ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor General's Office, and the National Police to focus on rape, security, and prostitution.

¶6. The Minister noted that the GOR has plans to further address the problem of street children. Currently, there is

a draft law to protect street children by targeting operators of establishments that provide venues for child prostitution, e.g., hotels and cinema halls. Ambassador commented that it has been very difficult to obtain reliable information on the extent and nature of child prostitution and ways to address the issue. Noting that Sharing Rwanda estimated in 2000 that there were 2,140 child prostitutes in Rwanda, he asked the Minister if she knew the source of that information and whether the GOR had its own statistics.

¶17. The Minister characterized Sharing Rwanda's data as incorrect and said she was not aware of the source and that her office only considers official data provided by the National Police, Ministry of Justice, or the Prosecutor General. She cited an estimate of 6,500 street children, some of whom are prostitutes, but noted that this estimate was made one year after the 1994 genocide. She said that UNICEF has found that the number of street children is not increasing.

¶18. She observed that gender-based violence is the big problem in Rwanda and that prostitution is considered one aspect of this broader problem. She explained that the act of prostitution is illegal both for the client and the prostitute. The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission is conducting a survey on the impact of genocide on gender-based violence, including prostitution, and developing policy regarding gender-based violence with assistance from international consultants. In addition, the Minister is negotiating with other agencies to develop legislation to provide greater protection for the victims of such violence.

¶19. Ambassador pointed out that while the Embassy recognizes the larger picture of gender-based violence, it is also

focused on the specific issue of child prostitution because the U.S. is very concerned about abuse of minors. While child prostitution is a small issue in Rwanda, the Embassy is prepared to fund Sharing Rwanda to support efforts to combat child prostitution but wants to ensure that its work is coordinated with the GOR. Ambassador promised to provide samples of draft anti-trafficking legislation from two other African countries for consideration by the GOR, and urged Rwanda to adopt similar legislation. The Minister replied that the samples would be very helpful as the GOR moves to amend its 2001 law to strengthen protection of children against violence.

Arietti